THREE LITTLE HOUSEKEEPERS

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THREE LITTLE HOUSEKEEPERS

CAREFULLY WASHING A PAIR OF LACE CURTAINS

Page 29

THREE

LITTLE HOUSEKEEPERS

BY

JOSEPHINE E. REED

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

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TO THE
THREE LITTLE HEROINES

CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
I	Loraine's Departure	9
II	The Shut-Ins	13
III	Marjorie Makes Her Debut	21
IV	Clyde Entertains	26
V	The Removal	32
VI	Some Strange Visitors	38
VII	Another Removal	45
VIII	The Second Christmas	52
IX	Marjorie's Visit	58
X	Christmas the Third	74
XI	Loraine Tries New Fields	82
XII	The Expected Request	87
XIII	Corinne and the Junk Shop	91
XIV	Christmas Again	95
XV	Decisive Changes	98
XVI	The Last Christmas	103
	Jibwishka	111

THREE LITTLE HOUSEKEEPERS

I.

LORAINE'S DEPARTURE.

MARJORIE and Corinne sat up in bed and waved their hands and threw kisses to the slender form outside the window. She looked so little mid the snowy banks around her; and the mother eyes would have filled with tears if they had not been past weeping. Uncle Don lifted the little girl into the hack and they were whirled away while the mother turned her attention from the child she could not kiss goodbye to the two little children indoors.

"Will she be away long, mamma?" asked Corinne, with the same serious look she had worn ever since troubles had come so thick and fast.

"Loraine is not coming back," answered the mother, smothering a break in her voice. "We will go, too, as soon as you are well."

"Will we go to Uncle Don's?" asked little Marjorie.

"Yes, just as soon as the doctor takes our quarantine sign down."

"And will papa come, too?" she whispered to her sister; but Corinne, with a thoughtfulness far beyond her eight years of existence, shook her head in silence so that her mother might not notice the question.

The children resumed cutting paper dolls, which was the only pastime they could indulge in at present. Paper playthings could be burned when they fumigated the house and they did not wish to leave contagion to others.

"See my fingers! They look like my gloves were wearing out," said Corinne as she spread out her little hands, from which the skin was peeling off after an attack of scarlet fever.

"Guess I'll pull it all off," said Marjorie; "Mamma says we can go to Uncle Don's soon as it is all off."

Mrs. Wallace came to the bedside with a bowl of gruel. Poor children, they had eaten gruel until Corinne told Marjorie under the bedcovers that she never knew there was so

much gruel in all the world; but some way or other they understood it was all mother could afford, so they swallowed it uncomplainingly. The past few weeks had witnessed the breaking up of a once happy home and the transformation of a family in comfortable circumstances to one of very limited means. They had learned that for some mysterious reason father would never come home again. The day following this discovery Corinne came home from school ill. The doctor pronounced it scarlet fever. Marjorie and Loraine were at once sent to their paternal grandmother, between whom and the young mother existed an implacable enmity. In the middle of the night Loraine heard sounds of distress, and the remaining slow dragging hours were spent in trying to cheer the little sufferer beside her. In the morning she told Grandma of the new victim and a cab was called and Marjorie was taken home.

"Why, she can't come in here," remonstrated Mrs. Wallace, as she opened the door and found her baby daughter bundled from head to foot, standing outside.

"She has scarlet fever, too," explained the cabman, and hurried away.

Heartbreak, a broken home, sickness and no money. One might complain of trifles, but such a combination as this was too great for words and in silence Mrs. Wallace undressed the little one and placed her beside Corinne. Then followed days of suffering for the children, and nights of sleepless vigil on the part of Mrs. Wallace. As soon as possible Uncle Don had come from a nearby town and taken Loraine to his home, and it was her farewell to her sisters that we witnessed at the beginning of this story.

It was through these weeks that the children learned a great deal of patience. It was a new experience to see mother throw herself down on the bed and cry. These spells did not last long, but they felt that mother needed help and they checked their own fretfulness in their efforts to comfort her.

II.

THE SHUT-INS.

AFTER her great troubles, Mrs. Wallace felt she had one hard task before her—an important one because she knew it would affect her children's happiness.

"Girlies," she began, hesitatingly, "do you know it is awfully close to Christmas?"

"Oh, I'm so glad!" exclaimed Marjorie, but mother interrupted:

"But you won't be glad this year, dearie, because you know we are quarantined, and if Santa Claus would come to us he might take scarlet fever to some other little girls and they might die of it. But," she hurried on to say, "right after Christmas we'll go on the cars to see Loraine and Aunt Gertrude and Uncle Don and all the cousins and that will be a whole lot of fun."

"Oh, that will be nice, and will we go really, really soon?" asked Marjorie.

"Yes, very soon after Christmas. And

now, children, let us say our prayers and then go to bed."

Mother took the little Episcopal hymnal down, and they sang one of their favorite hymns, "Art thou weary, art thou languid, art thou sore depressed." Years afterward the mention of the hymn always brought to the children recollections of these nights. There was something so mysterious about this shut-in period, with no one but mother, and an occasional visit from the doctor.

There was a solemnity and a sadness—and at the same time a sweetness about it—which they never entirely forgot. When the song was finished, mother and the children repeated together "Now I lay me" and "Our Father"; a little general prayer followed, after which mother kissed them goodnight. There had been a time when mother had laughingly kissed their eyelids shut with "fairy kisses," as she said, and they would not be able to open their eyes until she gave them another fairy kiss in the morning, but that had been before these troublesome days came upon them.

The day before Christmas arrived. Grandma Wallace was "puttering" around the

kitchen in a lonely, aimless fashion but with hard, bitter feelings. Mrs. Martin, a pleasant, sweet-faced neighbor, came in for a morning call.

"Good morning, Mrs. Wallace. Getting ready for Christmas?"

"Yes," assented the old lady; then adding in a dissatisfied tone, "Nobody much to get ready for, just me and Henry."

"I've been thinking, Mrs. Wallace, about those little sick children," continued the caller, "and I thought you might not feel well enough to do it yourself, but if you wanted to order anything for their Christmas dinner I could cook it and we could send it over."

Grandma Wallace's face hardened but she was ashamed to say no.

The Christmas stars shone over a beautiful winter landscape. The trees were clothed in snowy whiteness, and the ground sparkled with glistening gems underneath. Mrs. Wallace was almost glad to pull down the shades. The out-of-doors seemed too glorious for comparison with the cramped quarters inside. The two rooms they had kept in use were too crowded for elegance, but they

were easy to heat, and would be less trouble to fumigate.

After assuring herself that the outside world could not pry upon their meager, lonely Christmas, Mrs. Wallace seated herself in a rocking chair by the children's bed. There was a sudden rap at the door. Mother hastily opened it, but the visitor had already stepped off the porch for fear of the contagion. There was a little visit at long range, and then Mrs. Wallace returned, carrying a basket of large, red, exceedingly fine apples.

"Girlies, see what Florence brought, and apples like that cost a great deal at this time of the year. This is the first year that Florence has earned any money and I know she would have liked to buy something for themselves."

"She wanted to buy a horse and buggy so she would not have to walk to her school," said Corinne, thoughtfully.

"And a new rocking chair 'cause the old one had a rocker off," added Marjorie.

Another rap was heard. Mrs. Wallace again vanished, this time returning with a

more interesting looking basket. The children were becoming excited.

"This is almost like Santa Claus," said Marjorie.

Mother sat down at the side of the bed, while the children watched her uncover the basket.

"Oh, there's a story book," cried Marjorie.

"And one for me, too," said Corinne, for in her shy way she never seemed to expect anything for herself.

Farther down were some candy and fruit and a Christmas booklet for mamma, and a letter to the girlies from the Sunday school teacher who had been the bearer of the basket.

"We're having a pretty nice Christmas, I think," said Corinne.

"Yes," said mamma; "you couldn't keep anything expensive, anyway, for we don't want to carry scarlet fever to anyone else."

A mysterious sound was heard on the window pane and as the shade was thrown up, some colored balls were seen bouncing up and down. The children laughed and mamma opened the window, when the balls were thrown in with a "Merry Christmas"

from the next door neighbor. Corinne and Marjorie were now rather tired and after playing with their balls a few minutes, were glad to go to sleep.

"There aren't any stockings to look into this Christmas," said Corinne, on awakening the next morning.

"I don't care; I think it's a nice Christmas anyway," and Marjorie sat up and looked around for her presents.

Mother served their breakfast of oatmeal, thinking with dismay of what their Christmas dinner would be. The children rather longed for the excitement of the night before and hoped for another of Santa's messengers, but if any came it must have been at the back door, as the children strained their ears but heard nothing.

Towards noon mother came to the bed with the little pathetic smile she now so often wore.

"You girlies must turn your faces to the wall now until the table is set," she said, "or if you get tired, you must cover up your faces, but don't you look until dinner is ready."

This was really interesting—a different

Christmas than they had ever had—kind of a hide-and-seek affair. They covered up their faces and told stories and riddles until dinner was announced. They were not expecting much but they had learned to appreciate little things. Mother picked up each kimono-draped form and seated them at the table.

"Mamma, where did you get that chicken?" demanded Marjorie.

"And pumpkin pie and lemon ice?" asked Corinne.

"And—and—that great big beautiful box of candy," again demanded Marjorie.

"Grandma Wallace and Mrs. Martin sent the chicken and the pie," answered mamma, "and Corinne's teacher sent the ice. The box of candy was given to me by Uncle Don when he was here."

"Well, I think this is a beautiful Christmas," declared Corinne, almost reverently.

"It is a beautiful Christmas," repeated Mrs. Wallace; "beautiful because we know our friends have not forgotten us in their own happiness."

When the children went back to bed, they found a regiment of paper soldiers standing

on the window sill guarding their fort.

"From Linden" was the greeting on the box, in the childish scrawl of the next door neighbor boy, whom they played and quarreled with alternately.

"I love Linden," said Marjorie.

"So do I, and I don't care if he did lassoo me coming home from school. Next time I won't tell on him;" then changing the subject, "I wonder what Loraine is doing."

"Playing with a whole lot of cousins, I suppose," said mamma. "But never mind, we will go, too, pretty soon; just as soon as those fingers quit peeling off."

III.

MARJORIE MAKES HER DEBUT.

THE days which followed were monotonous enough, days in which mamma bathed the hands and arms and feet of the children to assist in the desquamation or scaling off process, for after it ceased, she was assured the quarantine would be lifted. Two weeks longer the siege lasted and then Mrs. Wallace showed the children what energy and determination and youth could do, for Mrs. Wallace was still very young.

The house was fumigated, the furniture sold or disposed of, and in a few days' time Mrs. Wallace and the children were aboard for Uncle Will's. A little crowd of boys and girls in a light spring wagon were waiting at the station as the train drew in.

"Oh, there's Loraine," cried both children from the car window, and in the joy of meeting the sister and cousins, the confinement of the past six weeks were forgotten.

It was certainly pleasant to be with relatives once more, who felt that one's troubles were theirs, and that one had a right to claim their sympathy, but Mrs. Wallace was not one to impose upon even her relatives, so early in February she and the little five-year-old went to Norton where Uncle Don lived, as she considered it a better place to obtain employment. Loraine and Corinne would remain at Uncle Will's until the term of school was over.

For a time it was a novelty and lots of fun, but soon there were days when little Marjorie wished her own mother could get her ready for school and kiss her goodbye, instead of hurrying away to work so early in the morning. Aunt Jennie had several children of her own to care for and Marjorie decided there was a difference between a mother and an aunt. Loraine and Corinne soon felt the same way; they needed a mother's sympathy in their little quarrels and mistakes, and sometimes they felt so dreadfully in the way. They wanted to be at home and take their little sister, with her long red curls, to school themselves, instead of letting their cousins have that honor.

They read mamma's letter over and over, telling of Marjorie's escapade. At the close of the first school week, the teacher had asked if anyone was prepared to "speak a piece." Marjorie was modest, but not so cousin Lila. A pudgy hand went up in the air. "Marjorie knows one."

So Marjorie was invited to the floor. She walked up to the platform with all the dignity of her five years, and delivered the oration which had so impressed Lila.

There were three crows sat on a tree,
And they were black as crows could be;
Said one young crow unto his mate,
"What shall we have for bread to ate?"

"There is a horse in yonder lane,
And it has been but freshly slain;
We'll perch ourselves on his backbone,
And pluck his eyes out one by one."

She left the platform with the consciousness of a duty well done, her only regret being that mother was not there to share in her triumph. Miss Turner was proud of her, too; she knew that by the little smile on her teacher's lips all the time she had been speaking. She had further proof of it at recess,

for Miss Turner caught her up in her arms and stood her on her own desk and asked her if she would not speak again for the superintendent and one or two of the other teachers, who were standing near. This was certainly very gratifying, and Marjorie repeated the performance. Her refined appearance contrasted oddly with the ludicrous doggerel, and the teachers smiled in full appreciation. Marjorie, with the keen perception of a born actress, felt she was scoring a success, and accepting the smiles as an encore, responded with another choice selection:

"Old Daddy Grimes, he had a cow,
But he did have no barn;
And every time that darned old cow
Would butt him with her horn."

This brought down the house, but the teacher's curiosity triumphed over her politeness, and she asked:

"Did your mother teach you those pieces, Marjorie?"

"Oh, no; she doesn't know I know any. Corinne and Loraine used to read 'em off a big card they had, with some tobacco pictures on it."

How the children laughed when mamma told them all about it in a letter, and how they longed for mamma and Marjorie. How Loraine remembered when the little sister cried because she could not sleep with her arm around the older girl's neck—"I can't sleep any other way," she had said. .And now it had been two whole months since they had seen her.

IV.

CLYDE ENTERTAINS.

AT last vacation came, and mother and children were reunited and began housekeeping by themselves. Loraine, who was now ten years old, tried to take mother's place, but it was an impossible task and Mrs. Wallace often found her responsibilities almost too great. They occupied two rooms on the ground floor of a rather large, pleasant looking residence. The front room, Mrs. Wallace, with her old-time pride, kept for a parlor, utilizing the couch for a bed. The other room served as kitchen, dining room and bed room. In the morning, the mother arose, and with the aid of the children, prepared the morning meal. She then hurried to the office where she began work at seven o'clock. At noon she visited the meat market and bakery, and the quartette would sit down to a dinner of steak, some canned goods and pie. In the evenings she sewed

and ironed, and her Sundays were passed in carrying coal (which was too heavy work for the children) and cooking and baking for the week to come. The strain was proving almost too much for her strength. There were many who sympathized with her, but none who had time to help. That is, no one but Clyde. He had plenty of time, but how could a fourteen-year-old boy help a woman with housework? No self-respecting boy could do such a thing. Yet how could a self-respecting boy sit around and waste time and strength just because a woman was no relation of his? Clyde soliloquized over the matter several days and then decided on a course of action.

The next Saturday morning, after Mrs. Wallace had left the house, he marched down the hall.

"Get up, girls, get up," he called, as he pounded on the door. "I have something to tell you."

Three pairs of feet scrambled onto the floor and three dresses were jerked over three heads in a frenzied effort of each child to be the first to find out what Clyde had to tell.

"What is it, Clyde?" they demanded, as they pulled him into the room and sat down on the floor around him.

"Well, listen; you kids get to work and I'll help you and we'll have the house all clean and dinner all ready when your mother comes home. Don't you know she is working too hard, and if we help her on Saturdays, it will rest her, you know."

They sat for a moment in quiet disappointment; they had hoped for more wonderful news than this. But soon the novelty of the situation appealed to them, and they all turned in and did the work better than it had ever been done before.

"Now," said Clyde, "I'll comb your hair," but he pulled down the shades carefully so no one would know that Clyde Wilson, first year in high school, was combing a girl's hair. The children were not allowed to light the gasoline stove, but Clyde was old enough to perform this feat, and when Mrs. Wallace came home she found a warm dinner awaiting her.

This program was followed every Saturday, Clyde bribing the children by promises of a ride in a rickety old buggy drawn by a

rickety old horse. Encouraged by his success in concealing his housekeeping proclivities, the boy decided to enlarge his field of action. Mrs. Wilson, who, like a wise mother, left everything unnoticed that she was not supposed to see, could not refrain from peeping in the side window after seeing Clyde emerge from the cellar door with a tub in his hands, and enter the Wallace apartments. To her pleased surprise she now saw the boy carefully washing a pair of lace curtains.

When Mrs. Wallace came home and found the clean curtains in the archway which separated the two rooms, Clyde considered it a propitious time to unfold his plans.

"Mrs. Wallace, if—if you wanted to give the children a surprise party, I'd—I'd clean up the house and invite the children and mother would bake a cake."

"Why, Clyde, that's just as good of you as it can be. But I'll buy a cake, and you can have the girls help you clean up and you can invite just as many as you want."

The boy was highly elated, and every child in the neighborhood was invited—every child except one.

He never thought of Margaret, the little girl who lived in the next block. Why, her mother took in washing! Of course, she was a widow and a good woman, but she was a little different from Loraine's mother—she was not so well educated. He knew Loraine had always been pleasant to Margaret, but —anyway, he did not invite her.

And Margaret heard of it. A party, right in the next block, and for a little girl who had been kinder to her than any other child had been. She had never been to a party in all her lifetime, and now she was not invited to this one. There was a terrible excitement in her breast, and a terrible temptation. And at last she yielded.

That night a serious looking little girl greeted her mother as she entered the house.

"Mamma, are they going to have a surprise party on me?"

"Why, Loraine, what makes you think so?"

"Well, Margaret says they have asked all the children but her and she feels so bad about it. She never went to a party in her life."

"Well, of course we will ask her. I'll tell

Clyde about it. I told him he could do the inviting, and I suppose he overlooked her."

Clyde was overcome with confusion and told a polite little fib by saying he thought he had sent Margaret an invitation.

The day of the party arrived. Clyde curled Loraine's golden brown locks, Corinne's paler gold hair, and Marjorie's red gold tresses. To be sure, his fingers were rather clumsy, and the curls were pulled a little harder than usual, but even little girls know that too much in certain lines cannot be expected of a boy and they made no complaint.

The cake and candy were secreted until the children came. Loraine pretended to be surprised the best she knew how, and Margaret and all the children had the "best time ever." When the sun went down Clyde felt better because of having made the children happy. Loraine was pleased because Margaret had been invited, and Mrs. Wallace thanked God that even a boy could aid in bringing some cheer into her children's lives.

V.

THE REMOVAL.

AFTER the party, matters went on in a very monotonous manner for a while. Mrs. Wallace was finding it a very difficult matter to "make both ends meet" through the long, cold months of winter. Her salary was very small. If Mrs. Wilson had not rented her the rooms for less than their real value and the family had not had a good supply of clothing from the winter before, she would have been unable to pay her bills. Her friends did some indirect missionary work, but they failed in their purpose.

"I wish you would let Loraine stay with me," suggested a traveling man's wife who was a member of the church of which Mrs. Wallace was a member but found no time to attend. "I need a sister for my boys, and I am sure I would give her a good home and good advantages."

"I will never give the girls up," responded the mother.

"But you four can't live on six dollars a week," insisted Mrs. Kinney, "and you can never get more for your work in this town."

Mrs. Wallace did not answer the remark, but made the same response to the next acquaintance who offered to take one of the children and educate her in music.

"You can't provide for those children," insisted friends, but mother love said, "I don't know how, but I will."

Deep in her heart she was filled with despair, but she was resolved she would never give up. At last, when she felt there was absolutely no chance to earn a better salary in that town, when everything seemed entirely hopeless, she seemed to have an inspiration. She sat down to the breakfast table that morning attired in her "best dress" —a relic of more fortunate days.

"Are you going to the office with that dress on, mamma?" asked Corinne, who was early learning lessons of economy.

"No, dear; I'm not going to the office today. I'm going to Wellsville. They have cheap rates on account of the street fair, and I am going down to see if I can't get a place there."

"And will we move there?"

"Yes, if I get work."

"Oh, won't that be nice. Is it a nice town?"

"It's a city, dear. It's about thirty-thousand population. You know I often told you maybe we would move to a city some time."

It was only a few hours ride. Mrs. Wallace had not been in such a large place since she was a very small child; and the task of looking for employment in a strange city was no pleasant one. She found one firm who took her name and said she might hear from them. She then returned home, and again settled down to work, monotony and almost despair, but she felt she had done all that she could do.

A few weeks later a messenger boy entered the office.

"A long distance call for Mrs. Wallace," he announced.

Mrs. Wallace felt a quiver of excitement. Perhaps there would yet be some way whereby she could earn enough to keep her family together. She hurried to the telephone office, where was located the long distance exchange. A masculine voice over the phone

asked her to meet him at the union station the next day as he would be in town for a few hours only. He had received her name from a firm in Wellsville and desired to talk to her in regard to employment.

The next evening when the children returned from school, they were surprised to find a large, portly man sitting in the parlor. They could hardly wait for him to leave, so anxious were they to know the object of his visit.

"Well, girlies," mother informed them the moment the door closed behind him, "we're going to Oklahoma."

"To Oklahoma!" they exclaimed, almost in unison.

"How soon?" asked Loraine.

"I am going in a few days. You children will stay at Grandpa's until the school term is over, and then you will come, too."

"Won't it cost an awful lot for us to go?"

"Marjorie can travel for nothing, and you two can go on half fare. I will travel on one-third fare—employe's rates, as Mr. Jenkins is an editor."

"Will you get any more money, mamma?" asked Corinne, who always felt her mother's

responsibilities as keenly as did Mrs. Wallace.

"I will get eight dollars and a half a week for a few months, and then ten dollars. It is not much, but we can live on that and we can't live on what I make here."

Anyway, it was something new to think about, and the children were soon busy getting ready to go to Grandpa's.

Grandma was dead and Grandpa was a very old man, but Auntie, who was far too severe and unkind to take mother's place, looked after the children for a few weeks.

Mrs. Wallace arrived in Oklahoma. She felt rather disheartened as she walked down the board walks of the town. It was a town of the mushroom type. Little frame restaurants with unplastered walls, partitions of flowered calico separating one room from the other; a few business houses; numerous saloons and three or four churches bravely determined to bring a refined civilization out of the frontier desperadoism. The residences were filled to overflowing, as the new population was pouring in faster than they could be accommodated with homes.

There was no opportunity for choice in

the selection of a home. The only vacant place seemed to be a plain two-room frame, unpainted, unplastered house, built L-fashion. What did it matter if it was not attractive? Had not Mr. and Mrs. Greene, who now lived in the pleasant cottage on the corner, called this barn-like affair home for several years? And had not their daughter, who was now the wife of a prosperous man in Texas, been married from this very house?

Whether it was an occasion for pride or not, Mrs. Wallace could not bear to bring the children to that unlovely place. She found a painter who agreed to put on a coat of green paint for a few dollars.

"The idea of wasting any money on that old shack," expostulated her employer, who was a bachelor and so used to frontier life that he could have lived in a dugout and thought it a palace.

At night Mrs. Wallace would hurry home from the office and put up the window shades and place the furniture; she would hang the pictures and arrange the little trinkets she had kept to give home a more attractive look.

VI.

SOME STRANGE VISITORS.

"WELL, what a funny house," said little Marjorie, upon their arrival.

"It's a funny town, I think," said Loraine.

"This is a nice big yard," suggested Corinne.

"Well, since you girls seem to be living outdoors most of the time, I don't see that the house makes much difference," remarked their mother a few days later.

The attraction of the outdoors seemed to fascinate her as much as it did the children, and many an evening she spent gazing alternately from her work in her lap to the glorious sunsets in the western sky.

The house was very loosely built and the front door would not lock, but what difference did that make in the cowboy country where men might drink and gamble but scorned to lie or steal? The only outsiders

that gave any annoyance were some peculiar reptiles that inquisitively poked themselves in between loose flooring or leaky doorsills. When a toad insists upon entering one's domicile, even though it be a horned toad, or a lizard basks in the sun, alligator fashion, on one's parlor floor, it is just cause for a slight feeling of exasperation. On the other hand, it gave one a decidedly "good fellowship" feeling to have "Pug," in spite of anything you could do, push open the door and insist upon making himself at home. Pug's adoption of them, however, soon had a severe jolt.

The portly gentleman, who was now mother's employer, knocked on the door one Saturday afternoon. Loraine opened the door.

"How do you do?" she inquired, in her best attempt at grown-upness, "won't you come in?"

Mr. Jenkins hesitated, then said a little awkwardly:

"I have brought you a playmate."

Cuddled up in the big man's arms nestled a little puppy.

"Oh, isn't it cute!" said Marjorie, and the children all insisted that he come in until the dog felt a little more at home with them. Mr. Jenkins was still there when mother came home. After she had duly admired the animal, she suggested that Mr. Jenkins name it.

"I think we had better call her Buster," he announced gravely.

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Wallace, who had grown accustomed to his joking. "Give her something prettier than that—something more romantic."

"That's a very romantic name," he continued solemnly, "it's the name of a Greek goddess who was the goddess of beauty."

"Well, let's call her Bonnie," pleaded Mrs. Wallace.

"You may call her what you like, but Fliegende and I call her Buster, don't we?" lifting Marjorie up on his lap.

"He has re-christened us," explained Corinne, "Loraine is Auspinarius, I am Hospidarsky, and Marjorie is Fliegende Blaetter."

A few days later there was trouble in the Wallace Camp. Everybody was out of sorts.

The rule among the children when mother was gone was to divide everything equally so there should be no quarreling. This applied to work, also to their meals. If, after the division, one wanted to trade her share with another, it was permissible so long as it was satisfactory to both parties. But occasionally it did not appear to be satisfactory.

"I don't want this egg," grumbled Marjorie, "I didn't want egg anyway for dinner. Won't you trade me your potatoes, Loraine?"

"No."

"Won't you, Corinne?"

"No."

"Well, I didn't want egg. Why didn't you let me cook what I wanted? Mother said any time I wanted to cook a little, you must let me try."

After dinner it was just as bad. Loraine didn't feel like washing dishes.

"Loraine, we want to wash the dishes now. You must help us now," declared Corinne.

"I'm too full. If you want me to help you will have to wait until I am ready."

There was no Clyde nearby to settle the difficulty, but fate sent a substitute. The portly man was at the door. He had evidently heard the wrangling.

"You children do up your work like good girls, and have everything nice when mamma comes home, and right after supper I have a surprise for you."

He passed on to the office and the children did up the work. After supper a double-seated surrey stopped in front of the yard.

"Here, Fliegende, you're going to sit by me," as he lifted her up on the seat.

They had thought it a funny house and a funny town, and now they thought it a funny country.

"What are those funny little things out there?" asked Loraine, as Mr. Jenkins stopped the horse near an odd looking section of ground.

"And where do they go?" asked Corinne, in amazement.

"That's a prairie dog town. Each little prairie dog sits by a hole in the ground, which is its house, and whenever an unwelcome visitor comes they pop down in their holes."

"Well, isn't this a funny place!" soliloquized Marjorie.

Farther on they saw dugouts, with pretty country girls carrying water from a spring, or leisurely talking to some young farmer on his homeward way. Soon they reached the river. The roads, which until now had been sandy, became sandier. Mr. Jenkins, who had become rather quiet and serious, stopped the carriage and lifted the children and their mother out.

"The surrey is too heavy with all of you in. It is a little quicky here."

"Why, you don't mean—" exclaimed Mrs. Wallace.

"Yes, there are quicksands near here. We are just entering them."

Taking hold of the halter, he led the horses in another direction, the wheels of the surrey clinging to the ground in a fashion which indicated the treachery of the sands. Going home he regaled the children with the story of two young men who, just a week previous, had been caught in these same quicksands. By unharnessing the horse, they and the horse managed to escape. This was at four o'clock in the afternoon. By nine o'clock the

next morning they returned with apparatus to extricate the buggy, but the sands had sucked it completely in and they could find no trace of it. The story occasioned some delicious thrills to run up and down their spinal columns, and altogether the children felt they had had quite an interesting and exciting ride.

VII.

ANOTHER REMOVAL.

TOWARDS the close of the summer Mrs. Wallace decided that their ventilated mansion was too airy for the winter, so she began looking around for better quarters. It would involve more expense but she must try to manage it. In talking it over with a friend, she remarked that she did not care very much how she lived while there as she would go to a larger town on the first opportunity. She wanted better school advantages for the children.

"Of course," the friend advised sagaciously, "you don't need to tell Mr. Jenkins that; he might not advance you as much if he thought you were going to leave."

It was a new thought to Mrs. Wallace, who had never found strategy necessary.

"Mr. Jenkins has been a good friend to me," she decided, "and I will be fair and square with him."

Accordingly, at the first opportunity she informed him of her intentions.

"Well, if that is your intention I can help you. I have often thought I would like to have a branch office in a city—Kansas City I think would be the best place. The live stock shippers all come there, and you could attend to subscriptions and advertising contracts, and also write up items for the paper."

It was a new field for Mrs. Wallace, "but," she thought, "if he is willing to risk a salary, I am willing to give it a trial."

"Well, girls," she announced at the supper table, I have decided not to rent a better house this winter."

"Oh, mamma," protested the girls, while Marjorie declared, "I know that toad and lizard will stay in the house all the time as soon as it gets cold."

"But we are going to move out of town," she continued.

"Out of town?"

"Again?"

"Where?"

"To Kansas City."

"Oh, mamma, that awful big place?"

"Yes, it is big; you know I told you be-

fore to be good and keep well up in your studies, and some day we would go to a city where you might have a better chance."

"And then we came down to this tiny place, and I thought we would stay here forever," laughed Loraine.

As usual, everything was done in a hurry. The furniture was packed and mother started for Kansas City. The children were to stay a week longer with a friend until mother had rooms ready for them. Such a wonderful week. It was presidential election night. The children were rather glad mother was gone for it gave them an opportunity to display their patriotism in a more energetic manner than she would have considered proper. In company with a few kindred spirits they promenaded up and down the street, chanting, "Hurrah for McKinley, he's the man; Bryan died in an oyster can." They ventured a little further from home and beheld a gentleman who had hitherto been considered a model of decorum, cutting a pigeon wing in the middle of the street. At this stage of the program they encountered Mr. Jenkins, who insisted that they face about and return home.

The next day they started for Kansas City, under the protecting wing of Mr. Jenkins. The trip was uneventful except for one incident. Of course Bonnie had to be taken along. As soon as they were seated, Mr. Jenkins looked at the dog seriously.

"Auspinarius," he commanded, "you had better put your coat over that dog; if the conductor sees him he will throw him off the train and this car is going pretty fast."

Each little heart nearly stopped beating. Bonnie was cuddled down in the seat beside Loraine and a black coat tucked over her. Soon Mr. Jenkins sauntered down to the smoking car and the children were left alone with the awful responsibility. The conductor came along. He eyed the children curiously, and then the black bundle more curiously. He walked on down the aisle, and then returned. Again he looked at the bundle.

"What is that under that coat?" he asked. "I thought I saw something move."

Loraine looked out of the window and the children pretended they had not heard. The knight of the punch watched them intently a few moments and then bent over the black

bundle which was becoming more animated every second. Marjorie had just decided to confess and throw herself and Bonnie upon his mercy, but at this moment the portly gentleman returned, whereupon the conductor winked very expressively and passed on. When they changed cars, however, there was a strange conductor who had not the honor of Mr. Jenkins' personal acquaintance, and the dog was unhesitatingly consigned to the baggage car.

Kansas City! After their sojourn in the "wildest, woolliest" little town they had ever known, Kansas City was marvelous.

"No prairie dogs here," commented Corinne.

"No going around the house to get a bucket of water that was hauled in from the springs day before yesterday," said Loraine.

"No toads or lizards, but I believe it would be more fun if there were," said Marjorie, who was a little dubious about these skyscrapers and paved streets.

The children found life in a city less interesting than on the plains. Cooped upstairs in two rooms without any outdoors except the paved streets where neighborhood chil-

dren congregated after dark—this was not as pleasant as prairie dog towns and big yards. True, their housekeeping rooms were more convenient, but as far as pleasure was concerned, they had more happiness in their Western home. They very seldom saw Mr. Jenkins now. After a trial, the experiment of a branch office seemed impracticable in consequence of which Mrs. Wallace obtained other employment and Mr. Jenkins' work was discontinued. The new position, although promising well for the future, was for a time less lucrative than the former one. Mrs. Wallace was naturally adapted to the work and was soon filling the place more satisfactorily than the man who had been her predecessor. But she was a woman, so her employers paid her half the salary she was earning and she, not being known in business circles, could not afford to protest.

After receiving her meager salary one Saturday evening she left the office and wandered down a side street. She knew the tears were ready to flow and she did not wish to attract attention from curious passersby as she stood on the corner waiting for a car; the winds chilled her gloveless fingers until

they were stiff. She raised them to her lips to warm them by her breath, when a kindly woman drew her hands from her muff.

"Let me rub them for you," she said, and taking the purpling fingers between her own warm palms, she brought back the retarded circulation. But the incident had restored all Mrs. Wallace's pride and self-restraint, and self-pity and tears were promptly banished. It was not long, however, until there was less occasion for self-commiseration, and her salary was more nearly commensurate with her services. Loraine, although only twelve, was now almost ready for high school and Mrs. Wallace found the increasing demands of the children outstripping the increase in her salary. The two-room suite was comfortably but plainly furnished, and the children and she always looked neat and refined. Beyond that there was not a cent of surplus.

VIII.

THE SECOND CHRISTMAS.

IT was nearly Christmas time. Little Marjorie had grown accustomed to the idea that Santa Claus could not be expected to find them in a small suite of an apartment house, but the children themselves were planning great things for mother, when she would give them the money for their Christmas shopping. And then came the shock.

"Girlies," she told them, "you will get your Christmas presents about the same as usual, but I don't care for anything. Why, I have had so many Christmases that I am just tired of them. So I will give each of you ten cents to get me something and that is all I want."

"But mamma!" they protested.

"Really, children, I haven't another cent to spare, but I don't care; in a few years you girls will be older and then you can buy me lots of pretty things."

"Such a Christmas for mamma after the nice ones we used to have," said Loraine, soberly.

"Do you remember, Marjorie, how we used to hang up our stockings and Santa Claus would fill them, but he wouldn't fill papa's and mamma's, because they were grown up?" asked Corinne.

"And papa would help us fill mamma's stocking and then mamma would not look, but would help us fill papa's stocking. Do you remember?"

"'Course I do. And I remember when papa and us hid the silver knives and forks in the closet until Christmas eve."

The three children went shopping with Loraine as chaperon. They had already bought presents for each other or they would have taken part of that money for mother. After considering very carefully, the three ten cent presents were bought and the children returned home. Their gifts for mother looked miserable and small. The day before Christmas the postman brought a letter.

"Oh, it's from Aunt Sadie," exclaimed Loraine, as she inspected the handwriting.

"It's kind of fat," remarked Corinne,

"maybe there's something in it for Christmas."

"Let's open it," suggested Marjorie.

"No; mamma has always said we should never open other people's letters."

"Let's not tell her about it, but put it in her stocking."

"And let's pray that there will be something nice in it for mamma," insisted Marjorie.

"Now, look here, Marjorie," said Loraine, feeling it was high time to put a stop to such imposition, "do you think the Lord is a magician like that man out at the park? Do you think he is going to change one thing to something else right there in that envelope? Whatever is in that envelope is in there, and it is going to stay there. It won't change into anything else."

"You don't know," said Marjorie, and she prayed just the same:

"Dear God, please do have something in that envelope for mamma."

"Get up! Get up, girls," urged Loraine, the next morning who scrambled out of bed with as much alacrity as if she were five instead of twelve, and had not learned the said truth

that Santa Claus cannot always find all the poor children in a great city. The other children shared in her excitement and mother, who was almost too tired to sit up, pretended to be as excited as they.

The contents of the children's stockings showed why mother had only thirty cents to give the children to purchase her presents.

"Oh, see my dolly," exclaimed Marjorie, "and a swing for it."

"And I have a doll and some paints," supplemented Corinne.

"See what I have in place of my beads," and Loraine drew a fine gold necklace from her stocking and clasped it around her throat. Mrs. Wallace, who hated cheap display, felt repaid when the beads were tossed over to Marjorie to adorn her dolly's neck. A pair of gloves as a joint present from Marjorie and Corinne completed her list. There were nuts and candies besides, which helped out their meager dinner, for Mrs. Wallace had strained her exchequer to the utmost in order to give the children a pleasant Christmas.

And now it was mother's turn. A ten

cent handkerchief from each of the two older girls and then little Marjorie sat down on the floor to note the reception of her present. Mrs. Wallace unwrapped the package very slowly. She felt the importance of the occasion to the child who watched her with such anxious eyes. She bit her lip to keep back the smile—two mischievous kittens beamed at her from the center of a blue and gold plate.

"They're beautiful, dearie, just beautiful," she said, and Marjorie felt satisfied that she had used good judgment in preferring art to utility.

But suspense was not yet over. The children waited in breathless expectancy until mother drew the envelope from the extreme depth of the stocking.

"Oh, a letter from Aunt Sadie," he said. "When did you get it?"

"Yesterday."

"And you didn't open it? That shows self control."

She hastily tore it open and revealed three dollars in bills.

"Oh, mamma, we're so glad," exclaimed the older girls, but Marjorie explained, "I

prayed for it to be something for you," and looked at Loraine in a reproachful way for her unbelief.

"There's the postman," said Corinne, who had been furtively watching the stairway.

Loraine seized the package and tore it open.

"A dressing sacque for mamma from Aunt Jennie," she announced.

This ended the surprises for the day. After dinner the children passed the time in playing and visiting the neighbor children and mother was so tired she was glad to rest.

IX.

MARJORIE'S VISIT.

THE winter passed very quietly for the children, who were busy with their school work. For Mrs. Wallace it was a strenuous time, and she seemed to grow more tired every day.

One day as Loraine was wiping the dishes, a burly form darkened the doorway.

"Lay down that dish towel, Auspinarius, and come here and shake hands with me," commanded a stentorian voice.

Loraine responded in a hurry, and Corinne and Marjorie scrambled out from the other room to see one they thought had forgotten them.

"Now, Hospidarsky, do you realize that your birthday and mine come very close together and it is now about halfway between? So, look here! We are going to celebrate our birthday dinner tonight. You two

kiddos set the table and Auspinarius will do the cooking. We won't need much."

He picked up a basket from outside the door.

"A roast turkey."

"Yes; put it in the oven. It is still warm and will soon be hot."

"Celery, white grapes, jelly, nuts, olives and pie," enumerated Loraine, as she emptied the basket.

"Now, you cook some potatoes and we'll have dinner all ready when mother comes home."

"You're pretty near an angel, aren't you?" said Marjorie, looking at him curiously.

"Yes, pretty close to one just now. No, Fliegende, angels aren't baldheaded."

When mother arrived, the table was all set and dinner ready.

"Sit down," ordered the autocrat at the dinner table, "our slaves will wait on us."

As he noted her tired look, he instantly formed a plan.

"You must let Fliegende come down and stay on my ranch this summer. I have a good Swedish family on the place, and they have two children of their own, and will take

good care of her. She needs the country air and will come back in better health and you will be better for having had less care."

She hated to let her go, but thought it would do the child good, and she knew that saving the child's board would be a financial help to her.

"But suppose she gets homesick."

"I will bring her right back. But I don't believe she will. Fliegende has a happy disposition and she will like the children and have a better time than on the city streets."

When Marjorie was told of the plan she was delighted. She was a child who took a great interest in everything, and a return trip to the land of toads and lizards promised a great deal of enjoyment. Loraine and Corinne envied her the visit, but Mr. Jenkins, in the kindness of his heart, had indirectly provided for them. It was an easy matter when passing through the town where Uncle Don lived, to stop off at Uncle Don's place of business and inform him of his plan in regard to Marjorie. By dwelling on the detail of Mrs. Wallace's needing a rest and the necessity of the children leaving the hot city for the summer months, an

urgent invitation was extended in a letter to the two older girls. No one but Mrs. Wallace credited the invitation to Mr. Jenkins' efforts. The children's sojourn, being in a too highly cultured vicinity, was so uninteresting as to be unworthy of record. But to Marjorie, who reveled in country life, ranch life in a new country was a source of continual enjoyment. On the morning of her departure Mr. Jenkins called for her early. He would take her down to the train without waiting for breakfast. Mother could go right to the office after kissing her baby good-bye. Now was the opportunity of Mr. Jenkins' life. He would demonstrate how to rear a healthy, happy child. Taking the little girl into a restaurant he ordered two immense breakfasts.

"Now, Fliegende, eat; eat every scrap of it. I want to bring you back healthy and strong."

Marjorie was too thoroughly excited to have any appetite, but she tried to comply with his request, and ate a little of the huge portions in front of her.

"That won't do at all," he insisted, "eat

every scrap of it. Growing children must have plenty to eat."

Again she tried, and again she protested, but her portly friend was firm. It was the first time in his life he had had complete charge of a child, and he fully intended to bring her back a miniature reproduction of his generous self.

So Marjorie ate, but on their way to the train her stomach rebelled in a manner which brooked no interference from Mr. Jenkins, and the morning meal was deposited on the sidewalk. Her new guardian had too keen a sense of the ridiculous not to be amused at the failure of his plan. However, he still had faith in his other ideas.

Marjorie's new life certainly promised variety. She found she was to divide her time between two households. Mr. Jenkins now maintained an establishment in town, which was the nearest approach to a home that he could command. In a cottage which he owned he had ensconced an elderly woman as housekeeper, and a few of the employes from the office boarded with them. Marjorie found herself in the hands of the

Philistines—a helpless child in the care of several bachelors and old maids.

Miss Combs had strong ideas of what constituted a lady.

"Now, Margie, sit right down at the piano and play; that's a little lady."

"But I'm awfully tired, and I can't play, anyway."

"Are you tired, dearie? Well, then play on the organ awhile."

Marjorie escaped one day and was found happily employed with the neighbor children in making red ink from redhaws, when Miss Combs discovered her.

"Oh, Margie, come right in the house like a little lady. Come in and lie down a while."

Miss Thorn's chief pleasure was to curl the child's hair. The natural curl had been somewhat spoiled by braiding, but every night Marjorie's hair was done up, and in the morning carefully combed before Miss Thorn left for the office.

"What a pack of idiots!" snorted the "boss," "I didn't bring her here for such foolishness."

So Marjorie was whisked into a buggy and taken out to the ranch.

"Now, Fliegende," he cautioned, "don't you dare wear a sunbonnet nor shoes or stockings while you are here. Stay outdoors all you can and don't forget your sand baths."

She did not need any urging. She did not want to be a lady, did not want to play the piano, did not want her hair curled. All day long she and the little Swedish girl played outdoors, ate plenty of good, plain food, and drank good rich milk.

"Now, we'll have to take our sand baths," Marjorie informed her companion.

"What's that?" asked Hilda.

"Well, I'll show you."

Going around to the sunny side of the house, she carefully followed her instructor's directions. She and Hilda laid down on the ground and covered themselves with sand until only their faces were visible. Shutting their eyes, they lay in the sun until they were "thoroughly baked," as Hilda said. Mr. Jenkins had great faith in close contact with nature, and he expected great results from this combination of sun and sand baths.

"What in the world are you doing, chil-

dren?" demanded Mrs. Jensen, who had just discovered their whereabouts.

"Taking our sand baths; Mr. Jenkins told us to," explained Marjorie, in an injured tone.

"Well, they looked like little graves, until I saw your faces. If you knew how you looked with just your faces showing. Get up and shake the sand out of your hair if you can. I want you to go on an errand for me."

When the children were ready, she showed them a small wooden box to which Mr. Jensen had attached a strong piece of twine.

"I want you to go to Reynolds'; Hilda knows the way. Then borrow their meat chopper and put it in the box and pull it home. It won't be so heavy for you."

Both children laughed at their novel conveyance and started down the country road. Marjorie was enjoying every bit of it, all the more for her recent city experience. Bare head, bare legs, unsoilable frocks, sandy roads, grass and trees and sunshine—who could wish for anything else!

"Oh, see that big spider!" suddenly exclaimed Hilda.

Marjorie turned and saw in the road what she afterwards learned was a tarantula. At present it was simply an enormous spider which offered her a chance to show Hilda, who was a little younger than herself, how brave she was. The rest of this incident must be credited to Marjorie; it is as she told it, and as it appeared to her. She boldly approached the insect and dropped her box upon it, then pressed her foot on the box and supposed the spider was exterminated. But either the spider was too tough or the sand too yielding. At any rate, when the box was removed, Mr. Tarantula was found to be unhurt and made a bound toward the children, leaping over their heads, and then bounding again. The children ran, terrified, fearing that in its bounding it might land upon their heads. At last they escaped and reached the neighbors' without any more hair-raising experiences. This may be a nature-faking story, but it is just as Marjorie told it, and Marjorie was a very truthful little girl.

A few days more and Marjorie was thoroughly acclimated. So much so, in fact, that when she noticed a stringy looking ob-

ject in the air which upon investigation proved to be a snake suspended by its tail from the limb of a tree, she took it as a matter of course, and forgot to even mention it when she returned to the house.

Loraine, who was visiting in a small town, was enjoying herself in a less exciting way. Corinne, however, seemed rather pensive.

"I never could understand that child," commented Aunt Jennie. "I can scold Loraine, and pet Marjorie, but I can never get close to Corinne. I don't know whether she is homesick or really sick."

"Just homesick, I guess," returned Uncle Don. "You know her mother always had to urge her to play with the others, when they visited here. She will get over it if you insist on her going out with the children."

But one day Aunt Jennie went upstairs and found the little girl lying on the bed and knew now that she was really ill. The doctor pronounced it typhoid.

"We can't worry Ethel," they decided, and day after day passed in the vain hope that it would prove only a light attack, and it would not be necessary to notify Mrs. Wallace.

Poor Corinne! It was bad enough to be sick, but to be ill away from one's mother was still worse. She lay on the bed during one of her easier intervals—her gaze wandering through the open window and resting on the field adjoining her Uncle's grounds. She was thinking of mother and imagining she could almost see her with her light dress and the pink trimming on her hat and her quick step. It is hard to tell whether one is dreaming or awake when one has typhoid, but that vision was drawing nearer and nearer and then disappeared—in another moment mother was leaning over the bed.

After that Corinne was alone no more; she didn't know when mother slept, but she was always there.

Mr. Jenkins entered the ranch house one morning early.

"Ready to go back home, Fliegende?" he queried.

"Yes," exclaimed Marjorie, becoming excited at the thought of seeing mother and her sisters once more.

"Well, Hospidarsky has been very sick but is better now. She almost died, but is

now nearly well and mother says if I bring you to Norton she will take you all back to Kansas City pretty soon."

"And they never told me Corinne was sick. And I have been playing and having a good time and never knew anything about it. Why, she might have died while I was running away from that tarantula. Why didn't they tell me?"

"I should think they would have known better than not to tell a little girl with gingerbread hair. You go right up there and tell them what you think about it, Fliegende."

Mr. Jenkins and Fliegende drove into town together. Miss Combs met them at the door.

"Oh, you poor, dear child! How you must have felt to be playing and having a good time and your poor sister almost dead. Oh, Mr. Jenkins, just look at the tan on that poor child's face, and her such a little lady when she came. Oh, Margie, your own mother won't know you; you're so fat and redfaced."

"That's what I wanted; just exactly what I wanted, Madame. That spells health; no typhoid about that," asserted Mr. Jenkins.

Marjorie was to leave on the morning train for Norton. Accordingly, so that she might reflect credit on her bachelor fathers and old maid mothers, Miss Thorn did her hair up on numberless strips of calico. In the morning she was scrubbed and curled, and arrayed in a new dress Mr. Jenkins had had made for her. She reached Norton early in the evening. Corinne was convalescing and the family were all assembled in her room. They had a special guest of honor on this particular occasion. Their old friend, Clyde Wilson of wash day fame, having heard of their presence in the city, had called. He was now a tall boy of eighteen.

Mrs. Wallace was the first to be aware of Marjorie's arrival. She rushed downstairs to greet her baby daughter and then ushered her into the sick room. As she took in the full effect of Mr. Jenkins' guardianship, she felt a strong impulse to laugh.

"Marjorie, your face looks like an American flag, only the field is red instead of blue, and decorated with freckle stars."

Marjorie was a good natured little girl and could appreciate a joke on herself as well as on anyone else, so she joined in the laugh.

Then she asked, "How do you like my dress?"

"It is about eight inches longer than it should be."

"Well," said Marjorie, "Mr. Jenkins always scolded about my dresses being too short, so when he asked Miss Lucy to make this, he said she must make it good and long, but when he saw it on me, he just laughed and laughed, but he wouldn't say what he was laughing about. Then he gave me a dime to go up to the post office and they all laughed up there."

"We know what they were laughing about, especially if you had the combination of those wonderful curls. How did you get them?"

"Miss Thorn did that last night. Last time I had curls like this Mr. Jenkins asked me if I wanted to earn a quarter; I said yes, so he had me come down to the office and he set me on a stool and showed my curls to everyone who came in. Miss Thorn nearly cried about it but he said if I didn't care, he didn't see why she should."

"Well, we will tame down those curls a little and shorten the dress in the morning.

Your tan will gradually wear off and you will be our own little girl again. I must say, however, that you are the fattest, solidest, healthiest looking youngster in the bunch."

Marjorie by this time was exchanging confidences with Corinne.

"Was it very bad to be sick, Corinne?"

"I don't think I knew how sick I was, but it seemed as if I was in bed an awful long time."

"But they were all awful good to you, weren't they?"

"Yes, they were; better than they are now." And the pale face grew very solemn with an "I-could-say-a-good-deal-if-I-wanted-to" expression.

"Why, Corinne," said Marjorie, in a shocked voice, which was almost a whisper, "aren't they good to you now?"

"Marjorie, if my life was insured like mamma's is, I would think they were trying to starve me to death."

"Well, what do you want, Corinne?"

"Oh, pickles and beefsteak and cake."

"I guess they just don't know how hungry she is. I guess mamma got so tired taking

care of her, she is just worn out," decided Marjorie and she slipped downstairs and into the kitchen. She was hurrying back with a plate loaded with indigestibles when mother waylaid her and confiscated the food.

The next day Mr. Jenkins came by with a horse and buggy and took mother for a ride. Loraine wanted an invitation to accompany them, but was too polite to ask for it. When mother came home, she was very quiet, and it was a long time before they saw Mr. Jenkins again. The Wallace family returned to their home in the city and the rest of the summer passed very uneventfully. Mother took them to a park occasionally Saturday afternoons, and let them patronize some of the amusements, but she never spent a nickel on herself, they noticed. Cat-a-cornered from their flat was an old church building and the neighborhood children congregated on the steps after dark or played hide and seek in the shadows. These diversions and occasionally attending Sunday school made up the sum total of existence.

X.

CHRISTMAS THE THIRD.

THE holidays were approaching again. As Mrs. Wallace compared their environments with that of the year before she felt that they were a trifle pleasanter. They now occupied a three-room suite and had replaced the old ingrain rug with a new Brussels. The home-made bookcase, with a dainty curtain, a few rocking chairs, a stand and a couch made the parlor a pleasant place, if not a luxurious one. Although the children's housekeeping, in connection with their school work, was not all it should be, the parlor was always clean and orderly and Mrs. Wallace was not ashamed of it. The bedroom and kitchen were sparsely furnished; in fact, they had only a "monkey" stove on which to cook. But who cared for that? They always had enough to eat.

"I wonder if mamma will give us more than ten cents for her Christmas present this year," said Corinne.

"I don't believe she will," answered Loraine. "She didn't give us any money for herself several times, and we were so little we didn't think anything about it, and she pretends she does not care."

Mrs. Wallace really did not care. Although her home was a little pleasanter each year the expenses for the children were greater and if there were sufficient money to pay the bills and give the children a happy Christmas she was more than satisfied.

Days and evenings were very busy ones for her and she had no time to notice the little mysterious excitement among the children. Sometimes she felt the depression that comes on such occasions when one rubs elbows with the rich in the great department stores; when one's few dimes are made to express as great or greater love than another conveys in a hundred times the amount.

She was watching the pennies now closer than ever, for the presents must cost more this year as the children were older and dolls and trinkets would not satisfy. It was for this reason particularly that she recalled the fact that Marjorie had not given her the

change after returning from the store a few evenings before.

"Marjorie," she said, "you bought something for twenty-two cents the other day and didn't give me the change."

Poor little Marjorie looked so guilty that the mother heart took compassion on her.

"Poor child," she thought, "I have not given her money for candy for so long, I suppose she spent it for that."

She was a little disappointed, however, for in her high regard for honesty she had always tried to be liberal with the children so that there would be no temptation for the slightest degree of deceit.

Christmas Eve came at last. Mother came home from the office and slipped noiselessly into the hall and vanished into its dark recesses before entering the parlor. After nightfall the children disappeared through the kitchen door out into the darkness and reappeared with some object which they carried down the three or four steps of the semi-basement in which they lived. But mother was too busy in another room to even entertain a suspicion. She had followed her usual custom—she could not afford presents

for herself, so her allowance to them would not buy anything large enough to need strategy in hiding.

As they sat around the heating stove, Loraine said:

"Let us sing our old Christmas songs like we did the first Christmas we can remember."

So mother took Marjorie on her lap and they sang:

"Jolly old Santa Claus, lean your ear this way;
Don't you tell a single soul what I'm going to say.
Christmas Eve is coming soon, now, my dear old man,
Whisper what you'll bring to me; tell me if you can.
When the clock is striking twelve and I'm fast asleep,
Down the chimney broad and black with your pack you'll creep;
All the stockings you will find hanging in a row;
Mine will be the shortest one; you'll be sure to know.
Corinne wants a pair of skates, Marjorie wants a dolly,
Loraine wants a story book, she thinks dolls are folly.
As for me my little brain isn't very bright,
Choose for me, dear Santa Claus, just what you think is right."

They followed with "Christmas comes but once a year," and then the sweetest one of all:

"Thou didst leave Thy throne and Thy kingly crown
When Thou camest to earth for me,
But in Bethlehem's town was there found no room
For Thy holy nativity."

After singing the songs which always left them feeling kinder and better, they followed the custom they had retained ever since the days of a happy home, with a real stay-at-home mother and a Santa Claus Christmas, and stretched a cord across a corner of the room in lieu of a fireplace, to which they attached their Christmas stockings.

Early in the morning they scrambled out.

"A guitar for me," Loraine exclaimed. "I didn't think mother could afford it."

"Oh, now, you can take lessons and join the High School Mandolin Club," said Corinne, who was always willing to give the older sister the first chance, as she knew her turn would come later. And Marjorie, who was a cheerful little body, waited patiently for both girls to "grow up," for then she would have the best time of all.

"And Corinne has some skates, and I can borrow them," hinted Marjorie.

"And I have a necklace, too," said Corinne, almost afraid she had fared too well. "What did you get, Marjorie?"

"A dolly and some games, and my dolly is the beautifulest one I ever had."

In mother's stocking were the little presents they had bought her but this time there was no letter nor bills nor dressing sacque. Evidently the aunts' families were making too great demands this year to allow of generosity for others.

But as always, mother did not care. She was glad she could do as much as she was doing and many a child did not have as good a home as their home. She would not think of the beautiful homes her old acquaintances were acquiring nor of the many advantages their children were having. Her misfortunes were not of her own making so there was no occasion for remorse.

No one seemed to think of breakfast except Mrs. Wallace, so she entered the kitchen alone. As she approached the little monkey stove, in the dim morning light she noticed

some huge object on the top. On striking a light, she discovered a granite iron teakettle arrogantly spreading its dimensions over the modest pedestal beneath.

"Why, girls, where did you get that lovely teakettle?" she asked, in amazement.

"Mamma, you know you needed it. You didn't have any.

"But how did you get it? You didn't have any money."

"We have been saving for months. We made up our minds you shouldn't put us off again with ten cents. So we would save one or two pennies, sometimes from change and sometimes from candy."

"And that is what I did with those three cents that you thought I kept," said Marjorie, who had been waiting for an opportunity to vindicate herself.

"Well, you poor, dear child, I am certainly sorry that I thought anything so bad about you. But where have you had it all this time so that I didn't see it?"

"We had it next door, and we brought it down the steps last night while you were in the parlor," explained Loraine.

"And we were so afraid you would come out, and the lid fell off and we were scared to death for fear you would hear," added Corinne.

"Well, girlies, you certainly did surprise me, and you were the best children to think of this for so long and to save your pennies. I never had a present I cared more for," and she put her arms around the little group. And the dingy kitchen with the bright new teakettle on the little stove which could hardly bear the honor of its distinguished burden became a glorified spot to the little mother—a memory which she never forgot.

"Oh, these blessed Christmases," she thought, "how it takes trouble and deprivation to bring out some of the sweetest thoughtfulness in the characters of others!"

XI.

LORAINE TRIES NEW FIELDS.

THE months passed rapidly. The golden brown curls, which would never grow long, but clustered around Loraine's shoulders, giving a childish look to her spirituelle features, had been tucked up into a more dignified style of coiffure. By dint of many hours of study by a kerosene lamp in their dimly lighted semi-basement Loraine would graduate the month she was seventeen. The strain had been telling on her eyes, and she had been taking treatments from an eminent oculist. About two months before graduation she met her mother at the door one evening as Mrs. Wallace returned from the office.

"Dr. Wills says I must quit school immediately," she announced.

"Quit school!" exclaimed her mother. "For how long?"

"Forever, he says. He says my eyes are in a critical condition and if this disease be-

comes chronic it will be incurable. If I did manage to get through High School, I would not be able to use my eyes afterwards, and it is too dangerous to attempt it."

"And you can't go to the University?" asked Corinne.

"No, I will have to give that up, and my dreams of being a high school teacher."

"You would have found it pretty hard to partly earn your way through the University anyway," said her mother. "It would have spoiled some of the best years of your life."

"But after dinner, Mrs. Wallace lay down on the couch, and washed away in tears her worry and disappointment. She did not tell Loraine her fears, but her continual thought was:

"Chronic! Her eyes have been affected for two years, and that is just about chronic. They may never recover!"

Mrs. Wallace's mother had been blind for some years before her death, so blindness was a very vivid thing to Mrs. Wallace, and she could not bear to picture Loraine in the same lonely condition as her mother. And the self-denial of keeping Loraine in school

had all been for naught; her plans now could never be carried out.

The children were worried by their mother's grief.

"I didn't suppose she would have felt that bad if I had died," said Loraine. "I believe she is afraid I may become blind."

After her outburst of tears, Mrs. Wallace regained her usual composure and maintained her old-time bravery.

"Well, if I can't go to school, I may as well go to work," said Loraine, so a position was secured at filing cards in a business office. The work proved too great a strain on her eyes, however, and was also abandoned.

"Well, there is nothing I can do except to clerk," she decided, "and you have always taught me to look down on such work."

"I did that in order to make you ambitious so that you would use your time in school," said her mother. "There is no disgrace in clerking, but they don't pay very well and I wanted you to be able to do something better."

"Well, it is my own fault," admitted Loraine, "you told me I was using my eyes

too much, and I would not believe it. I wish I had quit the mandolin club sooner."

A place was secured in a department store at the disgraceful remuneration of three and one-half dollars a week.

"Inexperienced! If intelligence, education and refinement, coupled with energy and a strong desire to work, cannot earn more in fifty-four hours, I don't wonder that people become dishonest," said Loraine disgustedly.

"Who is dishonest?" asked her mother.

"Why, the girls in the store. If they are having a handkerchief sale, the girl at the handkerchief counter gives each girl a handkerchief. If they are having ribbon sales, the girl at the ribbon counter gives each girl a length of ribbon. The other day a lady left a package on the counter, and the girls opened it and found it was an angel food cake. They cut it up and ate it, and when she came back they declared they had not seen it."

"I don't want you to do anything like that, Loraine. It won't be long until you get better pay, and you won't have to steal, even if it is only handkerchiefs."

One day Loraine came home with a hurt look on her face.

"Mother," she said, "must I go back to the store? So many girls come in who knew I was expecting to go to the University, and they know I work for a few dollars a week. They don't say anything about it, and I can't explain, but I wish I could work in a less conspicuous place."

"All right," said mother. "I taught you to look down on such a place, so I cannot blame you for feeling that way. Besides, your eyes are getting better, and can probably stand different work."

In a few days Loraine secured a position in a mining office, where her education and ability had more scope.

XII.

THE EXPECTED REQUEST.

THEN came the request Mrs. Wallace had been expecting for some time. The children were becoming young ladies, and their pride was outgrowing their surroundings.

"Mother, can't we move into a better apartment?" pleaded Loraine.

"Girls, I have always said that instead of paying more rent, I would buy a home. With fifty dollars down I could buy a cottage and make the payments each month. If you will try to help me, I think I could get fifty dollars from Grandpa and begin paying for a house. I hate to worry him, for he is old and has only his home, but if he could spare fifty dollars and take it out of my share after he is gone, it would certainly help me now."

That night a letter was written to Grandpa. After it was mailed Mrs. Wallace dismissed the matter from her mind with this thought:

"I almost hope he won't send the money. If I begin paying for a home, I will worry about losing it, and if I keep renting I will not have much to worry about."

But loving hearts were too anxious to help and the opportunity was not allowed to pass by unimproved. On the earliest mail came an answer from Aunt Jennie. Mrs. Wallace opened it with a little feeling of excitement in spite of her declaration of indifference.

"Girls," she exclaimed, "I've got a check from Aunt Jennie for fifty dollars."

Grandpa did not have fifty dollars in cash, at that moment, the letter stated, but he had instructed Aunt Jennie to send the money immediately and he would repay it later. Mrs. Wallace acted like a sixteen-year-old at the office that day. She could hardly wait until closing hours, when she could keep her appointment with the real estate agent. After a thirty-minute ride on the street car, they alighted and the agent turned down a pleasant residence street.

"It is just around the corner," he remarked, after they had walked about a block.

Mrs. Wallace, in her quest for a home, had had so many disappointments "just around

the corner" that she felt a little dubious. Streets which had been very attractive looking had merged into entirely different aspects "just around the corner." This time, however, she saw nothing but pretty, new cottages and as they ascended the terrace on which the house stood, she said at once, "Well, I am going to take this."

The inside proved as attractive as the outside. The house was built square fashion, with a porch running across the front. The parlor, with a large double doorway, opened into the dining room, and leading off from that was the kitchen. The one bedroom was at the front of the house, by the side of the parlor.

"What pretty papering!" said Corinne, as the trio inspected the house the next morning.

"And the woodwork is good, too," said Loraine.

"That's a dandy porcelain sink in the kitchen," said Marjorie, who had constituted herself housekeeper since Loraine was employed and Corinne so busy in high school.

As the water department had not yet been notified of the prospective occupancy of the

house, Marjorie was dispatched next door to bring a bucket of water. The lady of the house, who apparently had no interests of her own to engage her attention, immediately inquired how many "loads" they would have.

"If she is a specimen of women who stay home all the time, I am glad my mother has to work," commented Marjorie. "She at least has no time to attend to other people's business."

XIII.

CORINNE AND THE JUNK SHOP.

THE little home in the residence district seemed very pleasant after their yardless apartment uptown and the close proximity with neighbors who were not always very desirable. Expenses, however, were gradually increasing and it was found necessary to call on Corinne for assistance. Like Loraine, she had entered high school at thirteen, and had now finished her second year. Mrs. Wallace's employment was very hard on her eyes and she felt that she must be making some provision against the years when she might not be able to work.

Corinne's search for employment resolved itself into two opportunities: One, a very pleasant position with small salary and no opportunity for advancement; the other, in an office of a junk yard, with the opportunity of using the typewriter.

"The junk shop is the best opportunity if you have the courage to take it," advised

Mrs. Wallace. "Three months or less of practice on the typewriter will give you experience so that you can apply for a better position. You won't meet any of your old acquaintances in that part of town, and a few months will not be long in passing."

So Corinne, with her pride and her sensitive face and refined manners, "accepted a position" in the junk shop. The little Jew, with his keen regard for the infinitesimal money details of his business, was not a pleasant companion. Gradually, however, Corinne learned to take an interest in the colored family which lived in the rear of the yard, for the purpose of safeguarding its contents from depredations during the night. When the little colored tot of three would wander up to the door and the parents after a frantic search would exhibit their joy on discovering her, Corinne gained the broadening knowledge that parental love was something not confined to superior races.

On one of the gloomy afternoons when the junk shop was more dismal than usual, her solitude was disturbed by a shadow in the doorway. On looking up, she beheld a rough looking man regarding her fixedly.

She was alarmed but knew not what to do, as he was between her and any exit. He advanced toward her.

"I want you to change some money for me," he demanded.

She slowly moved toward the cash drawer, afraid, but not knowing what else to do.

"I don't think I have any change," she faltered.

"I guess you have, all right," he returned, in a leering tone; "I need about ten dollars."

She took hold of the cash drawer, then hesitated, but his advancing step and menacing manner argued against delay.

"What is it you-all wants?" interpolated a voice from an unexpected quarter, and a burly black form thrust its head through an open window.

The white and the black glared at each other, but the challenge in the colored man's eye bore a truer look than that of his adversary, and the white man slunk away.

"Oh, Mose," said Corinne, "I am so glad you came in. I was so afraid."

"Well, Pamelia tole me I dun bettah come up heah and see what dat fellah wants. I

don' like de looks of him when he cum in de yahd."

"What'd de man want, Mose?" queried Pamelia, who, with Pinkie, had now made her appearance.

"Nothin'; leastwise he changed his mind aftah he saw me."

"Well, I feel so scared yet that I can hardly talk, but it certainly did look good to see Mose's head in that window," said Corinne.

"Looked just like a ten thousan' dollah paintin', didn't I? Bet I looked good-lookin' that time," chuckled Mose.

"Any yuther time anybody scares yuh, just look out dat windah and hollah; we'll always be lookin' for you," and Pamelia, Mose and Pinkie returned home.

"Mamma, they looked just like the Madonna family," declared Corinne that night. "I never knew that black faces could look as good and holy as they did."

It was not long before Corinne secured a better position, but she left the junk shop feeling that the experiences she had had there were not without a beneficial influence.

XIV.

CHRISTMAS AGAIN.

ANOTHER Christmas season was dawning. This time no demands were to be made on mother. Loraine and Corinne had their own money and they would "divvy up" with Marjorie. No stinging poverty this time; just a comfortable sufficiency that was all the more appreciated because of other memories.

There were midnight services at the little Episcopal church. The solemnity of the night, the beauty of the stars shining on the glistening snow, all lent a quiet glory to the scene that could never be forgotten. As they left the church, they were accompanied by Mr. Evans, who lived nearby.

"Do come in," he urged, as they reached his home.

Noiselessly, for fear of waking the wife and babies, they stole into the living room, and surveyed the gifts Santa had left. Just as noiselessly they slipped out, waving their

adieus, instead of voicing them. Early Christmas morning the children—for they were still children—surrounded the sleepy mother.

"Get up, mother; do get up. We just can't wait!" and they pulled her out of bed. Their own presents were not examined.

"You must look into your stocking," they insisted.

Down in the stocking was a tiny package. No mammoth teakettle, nor kitteny plate could be in a package of such dimensions.

Marjorie took the package out of her hands.

"Shut your eyes," she commanded.

Mrs. Wallace obeyed. She felt a queer little movement around her neck and opened her eyes to look into a hand mirror and discover a beautiful amethyst lavalliere.

"Why, girls," she exclaimed, in an almost shocked tone, "for me?"

"Yes, for you. Why not? You look almost as young as we do, and you have a right to have pretty things," said Loraine.

"This is a punishment for the way you used to do when you compelled us to buy kit-

ten plates and ten cent handkerchiefs for you," added Marjorie.

"And the days in the summer time when you would take us to the parks and let us have a good time and never pay out even five cents for yourself," supplemented Corinne.

"And we are not through, yet," continued Loraine, re-opening the attack. "This is for you to sever our Christmas turkey."

A handsome carving set was now displayed but Mrs. Wallace was beyond the power of speech, and the girls turned their attention to their own presents. These were on the same generous order, and the day passed happily.

"Girlies," suggested the mother, "this is such a happy Christmas for us; don't let us forget those who may be having a Christmas like some we have had."

A hasty contribution was taken up, and Loraine was dispatched to a neighboring drug store which handled holiday goods. A little later a stray errand boy delivered the goods with a "loving friend" signature, to an unfortunate family around the corner.

XV.

DECISIVE CHANGES.

THE next two years brought decisive changes. Loraine was the first to leave the home nest, having married a young man of good habits and good parentage. The "old folks" built them a home which the young people were gradually paying for. At the approach of Christmastide, Marjorie had been married a few months and she and her husband would occupy their own home after the holidays. Dean had no wealthy parents to build for him, but by his own initiative, he had saved some money and a substantial payment had been made on the five-room modern cottage which he and his bride would soon occupy.

As the little bride and the young matron were reveling in the luxury of stay-at-home days and sure-enough housekeeping, they plotted for the pleasure of mother and Corinne, who were still "office slaves."

"Let's surprise them both by having a party Christmas Eve," suggested Marjorie. Her red curls were a wavy auburn now, but it framed the same round-cheeked face which was still that of a girl not out of her 'teens.

"But how? Who would we have?" asked Loraine. "Mother would not like strangers at such a time."

"There would be Dean and Will and I received a letter from Clyde Wilson today saying he would be here for Christmas. He wants to surprise Corinne."

"I am glad Clyde came to the city for a time. It needed someone who had known Corinne as a child to become thoroughly acquainted with her. She is so much shyer than you and I are. There's the postman. I hope he has a letter."

She returned in a moment.

"A letter from Margaret," she announced. "She is going through the city near Christmas. I will ask her if she can't arrange to arrive here in time for our Christmas surprise. She can stay at my house until Christmas Eve."

Margaret, of surprise party fame, had removed to California with her mother and

sisters shortly after the Wallace removal to Oklahoma. With true German devotion she had urged Loraine to write to her, but postage and time were valuable items and Mrs. Wallace discouraged the correspondence.

"You will probably never see each other again, so why waste the stationery and time?" she had asked.

So Margaret's letter remained unanswered until a second one came, in which a sensitive, affectionate nature bared itself to the reader.

"I thought maybe your mother would not let you write because I told you about that surprise party," she had written, "and I never would have done it, but I just felt so bad about it I couldn't help it. But I've been sorry ever since."

"Mother, can't I answer her letter?" pleaded Loraine.

"You certainly can," responded Mrs. Wallace. "I had no idea she would remember or care more than a few days."

An early mail carried a loving answer to Margaret, and the friendship carried on by means of correspondence had continued until

the present time. The experiences of the two half-orphaned children were related to each other year after year.

Margaret's mother had bought a tiny home in a little town in California. The town had many wealthy residents but very little business, and Margaret soon found herself installed as maid in one of these beautiful homes.

"I would rather have Margaret in some good woman's home than in an office," insisted her mother, who had no false pride on the servant question. Instead of rebelling, Margaret accepted the situation gracefully, and found the contact with educated, cultured people very beneficial. With German respect for domestic virtues, and German sturdiness, she found it impossible to consider herself inferior, and her employers soon accepted her at her own valuation. She was given the lighter work and the care of the children, as her refined manners and speech made her an admirable companion. But, best of all, she had access in her leisure moments to an extensive library, and there was where her imagination had full sway, and she broke the bonds of environment and con-

ditions, and soared into limitless space. The influence of the library was noticeable in her letters—"such wonderful letters," Mrs. Wallace often said.

XVI.

THE LAST CHRISTMAS.

AWAY off in a lonely farm house sat a man with silvering hair, thinking, thinking. He must be getting old; every year home was getting dearer and dearer—and lonelier. Time was when business had filled his mind and numerous friends had helped pass the leisure hours. But money-making now was not such an engrossing matter—he had enough; and friends now were not so easily made. After all, old friends were best. Where were some of his old friends—had they forgotten him?

It was near Christmas and one cannot be lonely at Christmas. It would make one shiver to be with the ghosts of the past at this particular time. He arose from his chair and looked into the mirror. He laughed.

"You are not old, just lonely. Forget the quarrels of the past, go out with 'peace on earth; good will toward men' in your heart,

and find the friends that you miss. God wot, it may be the happiest Christmas of your life."

The day before Christmas dawned clear and cold. Early in the morning Loraine went over to the cottage home to assist Marjorie. Evergreen, holly and mistletoe festooned the walls. The pantry shelves were loaded.

"This dear little house! I never will forget it," said Marjorie, "We were so proud of it after living in apartments for several years."

"That is compensation for being poor," added Loraine. "People who have had all they want can never realize how dear this little home was and is to us."

Towards evening mysterious things began to happen. One room was kept carefully closed and had anyone cared to peep in the windows they might have descried two forms sitting in the dusky twilight talking in an undertone or ghostly whispers.

The parlor was brilliantly lighted when mother and Corinne reached home. Wraps were flung off in a flurry of excitement. Dean and Will dashed up the steps in quick

succession and the family party were at last assembled. The lights were turned on in the dining room.

"Why, girls, you have too many plates, it seems to me," said Mrs. Wallace, in a surprised tone, as she glanced at the table, but she was interrupted by a scream from Corinne.

"There is someone in the bedroom," she exclaimed, "in there in the dark."

Margaret emerged from her hiding place to be met only by a blank stare from most of the company. The little girl of ten was not recognizable in the young lady of tonight.

"Why, mother, this is Margaret—Margaret Heins."

This tall blonde girl was certainly unlike the plump little German girl they had known. After clustering around her with a loving welcome from all, Corinne again slipped away into the bedroom in response to the feminine instinct to "primp" a little before dinner. Why, she had not looked into the glass since she came home! She leaned forward as she looked into the depths of the mirror, adjusting a stray lock and vaguely

wishing there were someone present, a little dearer than brothers-in-law, to admire her charms, when she saw a reflection in the glass not her own, and turned to find Clyde Wilson beside her. In a few moments they joined the circle in the dining room, who were beginning to clamor for dinner.

During the meal experiences were recounted since and of the days of childhood, Clyde even now embarrassed by the recollection of his failure to invite Margaret, and Margaret still conscious of her awful sin in spoiling the "surprise." Then the conversation turned to the future.

"Next year we will be in a home of our own," said Marjorie, proudly, with a loving glance at Dean.

"And next year so will Corinne and I," announced Clyde, who had been watching for an opportunity.

The boys whooped, and then shook hands with the prospective brother-in-law. When the excitement subsided, Loraine asked:

"What will you be doing, Margaret?"

The girl flushed slightly, and then said, modestly, "I will put in my spare time writing. I have finished one story which will be

published soon and I intend writing another."

"I knew your letter-writing meant something," exclaimed Loraine; "they were different from any letters I ever read. Every little incident was told in such a wonderful way. I am going to claim a royalty on all your work for allowing you to practice on me all these years."

After dinner was over, boys and girls repaired to the kitchen to wash the dishes. Mrs. Wallace stepped out on the porch. She wanted to be alone. It was a very joyful occasion and yet it was one of her saddest Christmases. It was the final sundering of family ties. The girls would all be in homes of their own, and where would she be? Her health was good, she was still young looking and would have no trouble in retaining her position. There would be money enough, but she wanted a home. She did not want to go back into the house until she could keep the tears from her eyes. While she stood musing, a man turned the corner of the street. He did not seem to be any of the neighbors. The rays from the arc light shone upon silvery hair, but did not disclose

his features. She watched him idly to see where he would go, but was greatly surprised when he turned in at their own yard. It was too late to retreat. He came up the terrace and met her on the porch. As he clasped her hand, he exclaimed,

"This is better than I expected—to find you waiting for me."

When Mrs. Wallace entered the kitchen, the last dish had just been placed in the buffet.

"Such a shabby trick!" declared one of the dishwashing crew. "Stay away until the dishes are washed."

"Just like we did when we were little. Mamma, I didn't think it of you."

"Even when we were little, we wouldn't act like that when Clyde was around. He could always make us work."

"You children had better hurry up," said mother. "Santa Claus arrived some time ago, and is waiting to deliver the presents."

"Now, mother, you've been nosing. How did you discover we had a Christmas tree?"

They hastened to the room where the Christmas tree had been concealed. The draperies had been removed, the lights

turned on and with the effective decorations Loraine and Marjorie had provided, the room presented a beautiful appearance of Christmas cheer.

Santa Claus stood by the side of the tree; not the conventional Santa Claus; in fact, the only resemblance to Santa was in the long white beard. The delivery of the presents began in a very dignified, solemn manner. Seven pairs of eyes scrutinized every movement to discover the identity of Santa, but a closely drawn-down cap shielded his eyes and that enormous beard covered most of his face.

At length he took three packages at one time and gave one each to Loraine, Corinne and Marjorie.

"Fliegende," read Marjorie.

"Auspinarius!"

"Hospidarsky!"

"Mr. Jenkins!" they exclaimed simultaneously, and three pairs of hands removed the beard and cap.

"Where have you been?" and "How did you get here?" clamored the girls, and from the noise and excitement one would have imagined they were still "Three Little

Housekeepers" instead of sensible young women.

"What a lovely Christmas!" said Loraine, later. "Of all our Christmases I believe this is the best. Next Christmas I hope we will all be together again, as happy or happier than this Christmas."

"Next Christmas, God willing," said Mr. Jenkins, "you will all spend Christmas with mother and me on the farm."

And Marjorie, who had been vaguely wondering, and trying to summon up courage, presented him with a little Christmas present for "Daddy."

JIBWISHKA

"I WISH you would not sit there with a book in your hand all the time. Come in and help me with the baby," and Mrs. Gray looked down crossly at the little girl.

Arline closed the book, arose from the doorstep, and followed her mother into the house. All morning long she assisted in the housework, and attended to the baby, but after dinner when the child was asleep, she resumed her book and her position on the doorstep. Not that the doorstep was an inviting place, but it was the only place she could sit unless it was in the house, and it was so dark and dismal and dirty in there that she did not care to stay.

Before she opened her book, however, she took a deliberate survey of the yard. Arline lived in some rooms back of a store. All around her were the back yards of restaurants and business houses, and back of her was the alley. The foundation, or ruins, she could not tell which, of a small building stood

in the next back yard. There was a superfluity of tin cans and garbage, but not a blade of grass. Delivery wagons were standing in the alley and errand boys for the different business houses loafed around the back doors or on the wagon seats.

After a long look at her surroundings, she again opened the book, but immediately changed her mind.

"Mother," she called through the window, "can't I go down to the park?"

"Oh, go on," her mother answered roughly. "You're no company to me, anyway."

The little girl closed her book and went. Anything to get away from that miserable home and back yard! She entered the park and seated herself on the grass by the fountain. Why couldn't she have had a nice home and good times like other girls? Why weren't there fairies as she used to believe? This world really needed them. They would be of some use. There were so many things to be set right in this world.

"What are you reading?" someone asked pleasantly.

It came so suddenly, just like the fairies in her books, that Arline looked up, half ex-

pecting to see a diminutive being with a wand in her hand, but no! it was only a fashionably dressed young lady, just like the ones she often saw in the park.

The old disappointed look came back into her eyes and she did not answer.

"May I look at your book?" continued the lady, who was really nothing more than a young girl. "Fairy stories! Do you believe in fairy stories?"

"No," answered Arline disgustedly, "but I wish they were true."

"Why?" asked the girl. "Why do you want fairies?"

"Oh, because we need them so much. There is so much they could do."

"And what do you want a fairy to do?" continued the stranger, with an interested smile.

"I want her to change our house and back yard into a nice place, and I want some nice clothes, and I want some pretty things once in a while," Arline answered, for the first time in her life daring to say the things she had been thinking.

"What kind of pretty things do you want?"

"Oh, things like that," the child went on, pointing to a necklace around the young lady's throat. Then, becoming ashamed of herself, she said, "I don't want very many things like that, but I don't see why I can't have one or two nice things when some people have so many."

"What would you say if I told you I was a fairy?"

"Oh, you don't look like one. You're too big," responded Arline, almost with a laugh.

"Well, fairies can take different forms. What do you suppose a policeman would do if a real tiny fairy came into a city park? He would turn her over to the juvenile court for truancy or else sell her to a side show."

Arline laughed.

"Now, just to show you I'm a real sure enough fairy, I am going to act like one. But you must remember that the fairies you are reading about were old-fashioned fairies who lived in much different places from this—and their methods would not be best for these modern times. The fairy of today helps you to help yourself, and does for you only what you can't do."

"Well, that is what I want," said Arline, almost ready to cry for fear her fairy was going to disappoint her. "But I can't do anything for myself. There isn't anything I can do."

"Wait until I look in my glass. This is my glass of the future. I see a sweet, pretty girl, very prettily dressed. I see a pleasant home—I'll tell you more of what I see the next time, for my glass is clouding up," and she placed the little mirror back in her hand bag.

"Am I going to see you a next time?" asked Arline.

"Why, of course; didn't I tell you? I am your fairy godmother. I don't really look like this all the time, you know, but I had to look like this now, or all the boys and girls on the street would follow me."

Arline was not sure whether the lady was joking or not; she could not tell, but there was a smile in her eyes all the time she was talking.

"My name is Jibwishka," the fairy continued, "and if you are ever in trouble, write a note and put it in the crevice of this tree; right here, so it can't fall in too far, but at

the same time no one can see it. I am going to give you this 'pretty thing' so you may know I am really and truly your godmother, and tomorrow at this same hour, come back to this very spot, for I want to see you. Give your mother this card if she is afraid to let you come," and she slipped the necklace around Arline's neck and was gone as suddenly as she had come.

The child could hardly believe it was true. She fingered the necklace, half believing it would vanish as the lady had done, but at length she decided it was there to stay and she returned home.

"Arline, where did you get that necklace?" demanded her mother, almost as soon as she entered the house.

Arline told her story, and her mother listened in doubting wonder. Her daughter had always been very truthful, or Mrs. Gray would not have believed the narrative. When the child told of the invitation to come again the next day, Mrs. Gray exclaimed, "You cannot go; the woman may be trying to kidnap you."

"Oh, mother," protested Arline, "it is right by the fountain where there are lots of peo-

ple sitting, and the policeman stays there all the time. Besides she said I should give you this card if you wouldn't let me come."

The card was read in amazement and then laid aside.

Arline went to the mirror and looked at her new trinket. It nestled against her neck so lovingly she felt as if it were a living thing. It seemed alive and constantly telling her of her new friend—her fairy godmother. The mystery of it all was so fascinating that she forget the stony back yard, the shabby interior and the fretful baby. Indeed, she found herself being sorry for mother and father and the younger children, who had no kind, beautiful friend to meet in the park. In her anticipation of the following day, she sang around her work and helped mother cheerfully.

In her eagerness she could hardly wait for the time to come, and ten minutes early she closed the kitchen door and ran over to the park. There was no one waiting and she felt a pang of disappointment. It had been too good to be true.

Jibwishka would not come back. She sat down by the fountain and watched the

waters with an earnestness that would have drawn any fairy from its depths had one been there. A pair of hands were clasped over her eyes, and a voice said, "Who is it?"

"Jibwishka," faltered Arline.

"Right!" laughed the fairy, "And now," she continued, "I have brought my mirror of the future, and we will see what it has in store for you. Hold it in the palm of your hand, and don't think of anything else and let me look into it." She looked long and earnestly. "I see two visions of what you can be, and I will give you your choice. I see a flashily dressed girl with a bright silk dress and cheap, showy jewelry. I see her drinking wine and going to public dances. I see a dingy home and a sick, worried mother and a daughter who is cross and mean to her. I see an old tired father who is breaking down under trouble. Now this is the other picture—I see a pleasant home, a happy cheerful father and mother, a sweet pretty girl who is good and kind, and—"

"Don't you see a Prince Charming? They always have them."

"Yes, I see a Prince Charming in the distance, and he is hunting, hunting for the

little cottage among the trees where he will enter and find the Sleeping Beauty and wake her up to a life of love and happiness. Now, little girl, which will you choose?"

"The last one!" exclaimed Arline.

"All right, little girl. Now in these modern days we fairies do things in a natural way. Magic is left to superstitious people. So you must co-operate with me if this is to come true. I will tell you what to do and once every month, I will come to see you; if you have followed my plans, you shall have a little surprise; if I am disappointed in you, I will vanish and you will never see me more."

"Oh, Jibwishka, don't say that," pleaded the child. "I will feel so bad if you don't come, and I will try, and if some time I don't do so well, give me another chance, won't you?"

"Yes, dear," answered the fairy, "as long as you keep trying I will come. Now, Arline, this is what you must do first so that you may look nice enough to live in that pleasant home you are going to have. First, you must be clean; keep your face and hands as clean as you can have them, and bathe as often as you can. Next, you must keep your hair as

nice as you can, and your finger nails and teeth. For you will never know how soon you may go to that new home I spoke of, and you must look nice enough for your house. Then you must be nice and sweet for Prince Charming will love you more for your sweetness than for your beauty. Help your mother and be kind to your father and the children, and one month from today I will be back and if you have tried to do these things, I will know it by the way you look, and you shall have a nice, pleasant surprise."

Again the fairy departed, and Arline returned home. As she entered the house, she noticed how tired her mother looked. She picked up the baby. Its fingers were sticky, and Arline bathed the little face and hands until the little one cooed as the moist cloth touched her lips. Arline's own face and hands were given a similar treatment and her hair an extra touch as she passed the dresser. She picked up some of the things from the floor and tidied the room. Her mother looked at her in astonishment. Care and poverty had been telling on Mrs. Gray and she had been developing into a cross, discontented, fretful woman, but now began

a dream that things might be more like they had been before sickness and misfortune had come into their lives.

All through the month she noticed an improvement in Arline. "The child is growing older, but I did not suppose she would become so thoughtful in such a short time," meditated the mother.

"How much nicer mamma and the baby are," thought Arline. "I believe the fairy has cast a spell around this house already. It looks lots nicer than it used to."

It certainly did, for Mrs. Gray had so much more time since Arline's kindly helpfulness that she did many little things the little girl could not do, and the home took on a much more pleasant look.

The first of the month came and Arline was ready for her visit to the park when mother threw a bombshell into camp.

"You'll have to take the baby."

Take the baby to see the fairy! That was preposterous. She was all ready to storm, when she thought of Jibwishka's saying that she must be kind. She conquered herself and would not let the tears fall, and baby was washed and dressed and taken along.

"How nice!" exclaimed Jibwishka, who seemed to have been making friends with the policeman.

"What a joke!" thought Arline. "He doesn't know she's a fairy and my godmother!"

"Now," said godmother, "you know this policeman, and you know he's all right. He says I may take you and baby automobile riding, so pile in. We'll take a long ride and if mother comes after you, our friend here will tell her what has become of you."

Arline's eyes opened in wonder; with a pleased expression, then sad.

"What's the matter?" asked godmother.

Arline was ashamed to say it; Jibwishka might think she was hinting, but the fairy insisted.

"I was just thinking how daddy and mother would enjoy this."

"There, little princess, becoming kinder already. Keep up your improvement another month and we'll take mother and father and all the kiddies along."

A long, long ride was had, and a stop at a miniature hotel where a dainty little supper was ordered. Then another ride, in which

they passed a little brook and a great deal of pretty scenery and Arline and the baby reached home just at dusk. The fairy set them down at the corner and waved her hand and was gone.

Arline and the baby trudged on to the middle of the block and stopped in amazement before an empty house. Had Jibwishka played a trick on them?

Mrs. Jenkins called from next door, "Didn't you know your ma was going to move, honey? Well, I declare. Well, you go down that way two blocks and then turn east and go two blocks more."

Arline could hardly wait for the baby's tiny feet. To think they had really left that miserable neighborhood with its stony back yard and neighborhood garbage cans! But suppose the new place should be worse? She hurried on until she reached a tiny cottage with a little plot of ground covered with green grass. And that was her home! It seemed like magic. This must be Jibwishka's work.

Her mother hastened out to greet her with such a happy face the child scarcely knew her.

"Oh, mother," she exclaimed, "how did you happen to do it?"

"We've been getting circulars for a week or two telling us about cheap cottages, and daddy and I have been looking at some, so today daddy had the afternoon off, and we hunted up the landlord and decided to move right away."

As the children reveled in the hitherto unknown luxury of rolling around in their own grassy yard, Arline sat fingering her necklace as reverently as a sister at her beads. It was Jibwishka's work, she was sure, but the fairy would not have done it if she had not done her part. How good she must be in order to help Jibwishka bring about the future she had promised.

The pleasant little home seemed to transform Mrs. Gray, who had really come of a good family, but whom poverty and discouragement had developed into a nagging, disheartened woman. With Arline's growing helpfulness and the more cheerful surroundings, she had taken new hope and started life afresh.

The summer passed, during which time Arline saw her friend regularly, always with

some pleasant outing or act of kindness. In the fall Jibwishka began to do some thinking.

"Pretty cold for motor rides and picnics, little girl. What will we do this winter?" she asked.

"I don't know," answered Arline, and then she added, "I wonder if you are a real fairy. You don't look like one, but you act like one. But you don't do things by magic, do you?"

"Yes, Arline, by the magic of a kind heart. Do you see that ring?" she asked. "That was given to me by a loving father, the kind of a father that very few girls have. It is a talisman, a magic ring, and I have been thinking that I could change that into some wonderful things if I wanted to, and perhaps I will. But it all depends on you, princess. Show yourself worthy, be good and kind, lovely and clean and sweet, help your parents and sisters and brothers and study in school. Just keep trying to do that, even if you do make mistakes, sometimes, and you will find that the best kind of magic."

The days were growing on toward Christmas. Mr. and Mrs. Gray were wondering what Santa Claus would bring the children. In other years he had not been as generous as he might have been. Of course the city had its Christmas trees for the poor, but Mrs. Gray could not bring herself to send the children there. She felt they must go with less rather than have the feeling of dependence. Arline was thinking hard. It all depended on her, Jibwishka said; maybe that meant Christmas. Oh, how she studied, and how good she was to the children.

"Let's show Nina how to say her prayers," said Grace. "Maybe she can help us pray for Christmas."

"I'd rather pray to Jibwishka," said Arline, who rarely spoke of her godmother, whom they all regarded as somewhat of a mystery.

"Let's pray that God will send us all a Jibwishka," said Grace, but Nina pleaded, "I want a Santa Claus."

'Yes, let's pray for Santa Claus," they all decided, and Arline began the task of initiating little Nina into the mysteries of "Now I lay me."

"Now I lay me—"
"Now I 'ay me—"
"Down to sleep,"
"Down to s'eep,"
"I pray the Lord—"
"I p'ay de Lord—"
"My soul to keep;"
"My so' to teep;"
"If I should die—"
"If I sood die—"
"Before I wake—"
"Before I wake—"
"I pray the Lord—"
"I p'ay de Lord—"
"My soul to take."
"My so' to take."

"Ask Him for a Santa Claus," urged Grace with impatience.

"Give me a Santa Claus and a dolly. I wants a dolly."

"All right. Now, Grace, it's your turn."

"Dear Lord, please send me a dolly and a go-cart, and I'll be good," pleaded Grace, who went right to the heart of the matter and forgot "Now I lay me."

"Dear Lord," prayed Arline, feeling the great responsibility resting upon her, "help

me to be good so I won't disappoint Jibwishka."

The young godmother eyed her diamond ring that night and said:

"How much good you could do Christmas night if you only would, and how much more my father would care for an unselfish spirit than one jewel more or less."

"Did Santy Taus come?" murmured little Nina sleepily, Christmas morning.

"Hurry, let's get up and see," exclaimed Grace.

They seized hold of Arline's hand and rushed into the parlor where the older girl nearly screamed for surprise.

There were the two dollies, a go-cart and a piano. True, the dolls were not expensive, and the piano was second hand, but mother and father and Arline were delighted with it. Mother, who had known a little of music when she was younger, sat down and played a simple waltz, and Nina danced in baby fashion.

"Where did it come from, Mother?" asked Arline, although she was sure she knew.

"It was sent up from a music house yes-

terday. They did not know who brought it but it was our name and address."

Arline hurried to the shelter house in the park on her next meeting day with her godmother. She could not resist the impulse to feel through Jibwishka's gloved hand for the ring.

"It's gone," she said.

"Yes, I told you it was a magic ring, and I could change it into anything I wanted to," she smiled.

"I wonder if you changed it into a piano," asked the child.

"You must never ask fairies questions. They would not be fairies if they were not mysterious."

Between the piano and school hours, the time passed rapidly for Arline. She was growing into a lovely, tall young girl, and often when she looked into the mirror she was reminded of the vision Jibwishka had seen in her glass of the future. Her fairy did not do so many wonderful things for the family now, as they did not need it, but she often saw Arline and her kindly sympathy and influence helped her over some hard places.

Of late there seemed to be a sadness about Jibwishka that puzzled Arline, but she could not ask her the cause. How anybody so beautiful and good could be unhappy was something she could not understand. She put the question to one of her teachers in business college one day, during an intermission.

"Don't you think some one who is always making others happy ought to be happy herself?" she queried.

"Certainly," responded Mr. Hayden, "and isn't she?"

"No, she isn't," the girl answered, "She's a friend of mine, and lately she is always sad. I can't help but think about her."

"She must be a pretty fine girl if she is always making others happy. What is her name?"

"Jibwishka," replied Arline, smiling at the appellation which she knew would sound odd to others.

"Jibwishka! Is she an Indian?"

"I think she is an East Indian princess. Really, I don't know much about her, but she has been very kind to me—my good fairy, in fact."

"Does she look like an East Indian?" he continued, in an interested tone.

"I'll show you her picture," she answered, in a sudden burst of confidence, for Jibwishka had always been a sacred subject to her and was not to be discussed with strangers.

She opened the locket and flashed before him the picture of a beautiful girl with loving, thoughtful eyes.

"Oh, I have seen her a number of times," he remarked, "But why do you call her Jibwishka?"

"That is just a nickname," she said hastily. "We call her that just for fun."

"But you said she is sad all the time; why is that?"

"I don't know," replied Arline, growing confidential again, "but she is so sad I almost want to cry. I can hardly bear to be with her."

"Well, I know a friend of hers, and he is sad all the time, too. I wonder if you could not straighten this out."

"Oh, if I only could." She rose to her feet impatiently. "Tell me his name, and I'll go at once."

The instructor smiled. It was a delicate mission, one that could not be handled except by just such an impulsive, loving girl as this. He gave her a tiny card with a name and address inscribed on it. She left the school at once and hurried to a young lawyer's office.

Russell Graham sat in his private office turning over his papers in a desultory manner. There was always a face interposing itself between his own and the papers in his hand. How could he be aware of their contents with this vision before him? Oh, well, he would let it all go; she could not have cared very much for him or she would not have been so easily offended or so slow to forgive. What difference did it all make, anyway! After arriving at this sensible conclusion, he picked up his pencil and continued to sit there in the same abstracted manner as before.

"A young lady to see you, Mr. Graham," announced the office boy.

He entered the outer room with a questioning air. Arline rose to her feet, and then realized she had no idea of what she was going to say.

"I—I came to see you about Jibwishka," she stammered.

"Jibwishka!" He looked at her in amazement.

"Oh, I don't know her other name," she explained, "but here is her picture," and she opened her locket.

A hard look came over his face when he saw its contents. "I don't know what this has to do with me."

"Well, she is always sad; it makes me want to cry, and Mr. Hayden said you were sad, too, so I thought I would come and straighten it out."

"But how can you straighten it out?" he inquired.

"Well, if you knew how good she was, you could never be cross with her. Why, she's a regular angel; she's my godmother and my fairy—"

"Why in the world do you call her Jibwishka, and what do you mean by this other stuff?" he demanded.

Arline paused.

"You must think I'm crazy," she answered. "I am so used to all this from the time I was a little girl that I can't think how silly it

must sound to other people. Well, I'll tell you all about it."

And then she told him the whole story. He clasped her hand in gratitude when she had finished.

"I agree with you," he replied. "A girl like that is too good to lose for a silly quarrel. And now I will depend on you to help me out."

That night a beautiful girl sat alone in her own apartments. She had all that money could give, but that was not enough, and a hungry heart was crying out against its loneliness. Her parents were dead, and an elderly aunt shared her home. Russell was displeased with her, and she could not beg him to come back. She must wait until he made the first advances. Her glance fell on the calendar.

"Tomorrow is the tenth. My day for meeting Arline; she may need me. So many discouragements come up in a young girl's life and perhaps I can help her."

Endeavoring to put her own troubles out of her mind, she tried to plan some new way to help Arline or the children.

When the morrow came, she sauntered

down to the old oak where for old times' sake she and Arline still occasionally met. She smiled when in the crevice she found a little note.

"Dear Jibwishka," it read, "wait for me if I am a little late, for I will surely be there."

She sat down on a bench and was soon dreaming of old days, when she first met Arline and Russell. A pair of hands was clasped over her eyes.

"Jibwishka!"

It startled her. Russell's voice, but how did he know that name? The hands unclasped, and she was looking into Russell's eyes. She tried to look stern, but failed.

"Jibwishka," he continued, "look in your glass and tell me my future. Will the girl I love forgive me or must I die unshriven?"

She hesitated and then drew a mirror from her handbag.

"Look in the glass, and see your future for yourself," she answered, and as he gazed into its depths, the golden head nestled by his brown hair and he beheld the reflection of himself and Jibwishka.